

**Chambercombe**

**Manor Farm :**

**Its History and Legend.**



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rear of 9, High Street, Ilfracombe.



# Chambercombe Manor Farm.



Plaster Arms found in the Manor House, Chambercombe.

## Its History and Legend.

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## Chambercombe Manor Farm.

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### ITS HISTORY.

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CHAMBERCOMBE Farm, once the Manor House of Chambercombe, is exceedingly interesting to visitors and antiquarians, by reason of its age, history, its beautiful situation, and legends.

Though dating from the eleventh century it retains much of its original architecture in a wonderful state of preservation.

The earliest positive record we have of it is when it was in the possession of Sir Henry de Champernowne (or Chambernon), who was lord of the manor of Ilfracombe in 1162, but it is probable that it became the property of the family soon after the Norman Conquest.

Sir William Pole states that "in the reign of Henry II (1154-1189) Sir Henry held one Knight's fees (about 1,000 acres). He married Rohais de Campo Ernulphi, who brought to him a second Knight's fee in Ilfracombe." He also possessed the advowson of the living of Ilfracombe, and a grandson of his (also a Sir Henry) presented the living to Oliver de Tracey, the first recorded incumbent of the parish. He afterwards presented it to Sir Reginald de Chambernon, who was also



Prebendary and Canon of Exeter, and a Canon of the Collegiate Church of Glasney in Cornwall.

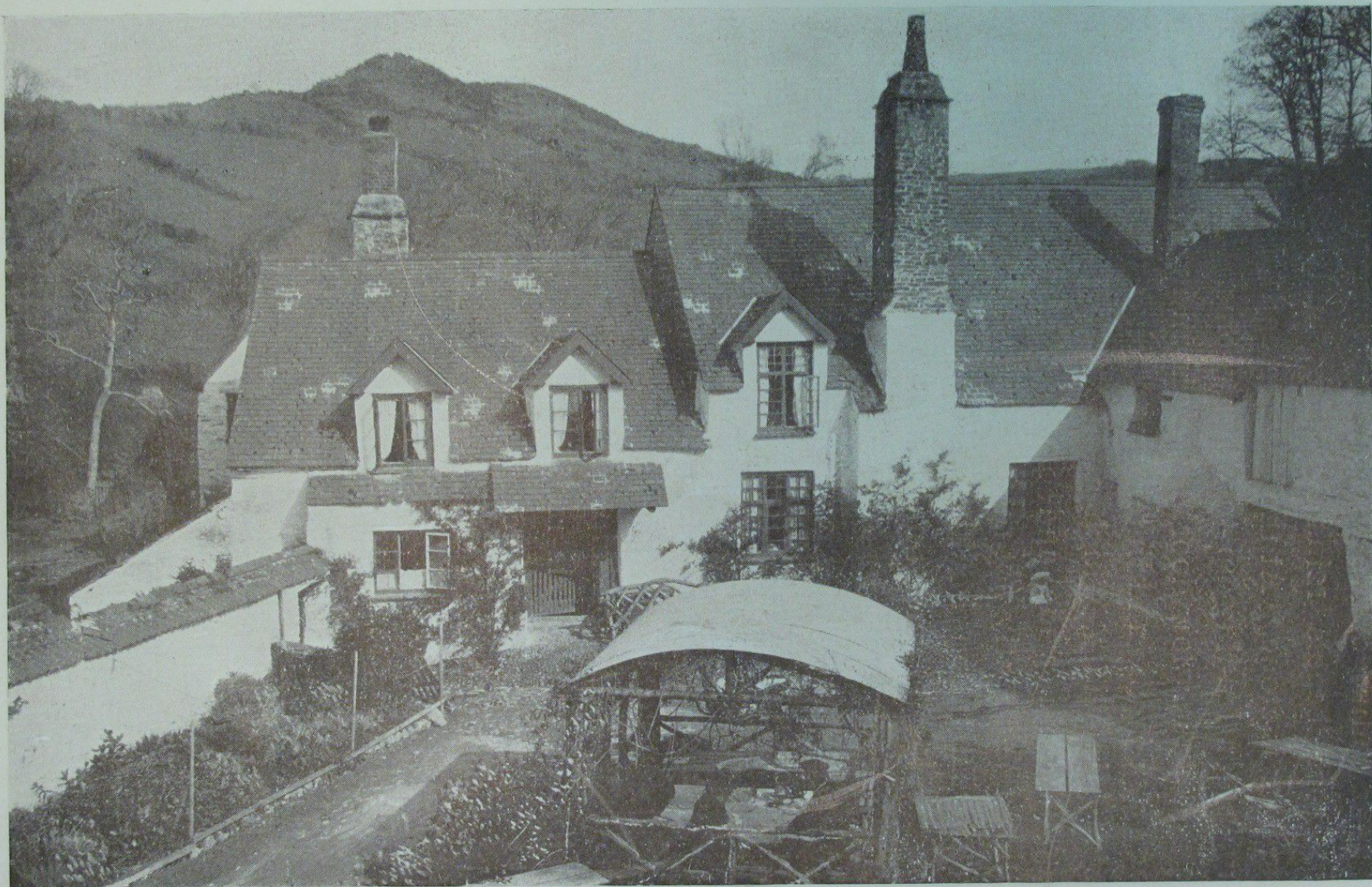
The Manor and the living continued in the hands of the Champernownes until the fifteenth century, when this branch of the family became extinct, passing through the families of Polglass, Herles and Bonville to the Duke of Suffolk (father of Lady Jane Grey) and by his attainder, to the Crown. Lady Jane Grey is said to have slept in one of the rooms (that above the hall) when on a visit to the Champernowne's.

It is not certain when the house fell from its high estate and became a farm house, but it has evidently been so used for a long time. Nevertheless, it has suffered less in the transition than might be expected, and much remains of the former grandeur, both in the fabric of the building and in the decorations.

The entrance is from a courtyard of which the house forms one end, the other end and one side being occupied by buildings, which were probably the outbuildings of the residence, but are now used as farm buildings.

The entrance door, now painted, is probably of oak and is studded with bolts. From here one passes along a flagged passage which runs right through the house into a courtyard at the rear. On the right hand side of the passage is the dining hall, a fine oak beamed chamber, 7 ft. 6 in. high. It measures 25 ft. by 22 ft. with deep windows between which is a large open fireplace. The latter is 6 ft. wide and 2 ft. deep with wrought dogs for burning logs. Quaint old iron crooks are suspended from the back of the chimney to support kettles and saucepans. A very old oak chest for holding small logs stands by the fireplace.





THE MANOR HOUSE, CHAMBERCOMBE.



The ceiling of the apartment is supported on chamfered oak beams 12in. by 12ins. and 15in. by 12in. The floor is stone. At the further end of the room are some steps leading up to other rooms. On the left of these steps is a low doorway, Norman in structure, with black oak jambs and lintels, measuring 5ft. in height by 2ft. 6in. in width, which admits to a tiny chapel 14ft. long, 6ft. 6in. wide and 6ft. 6in. high. The present ceiling is evidently not the original one, and it may be that investigation would reveal much of interest to the antiquarian. Outside the door is a piscina, in which the sacred vessels were washed.

Above the hall is a room (already mentioned as having been occupied by Lady Jane Grey) of great interest. It has a wagon top ceiling, which has hanging from the centre a large carved oak drop pendant; possibly used to suspend a lamp from. The bottom ends of the oak principals are to be seen, and it is possible that the whole roof is of oak, but it has been quite obscured by plaster and whitewash. Across the end walls are friezes 14in. deep, of carved scroll work in which is plainly decernable the Tudor Rose. Another very interesting feature is a carved coat of arms over the fireplace (*see frontispeice.*) In the centre is a shield bearing a lion rampant and a half moon, the latter showing that at this time the house belonged to the second branch of the family. There is also an esquire's helmet, plumes and mantling, but no crest. It is surrounded by beautifully carved apples, grapes, vineleaves, knotted cords and tassels. This fine piece of work was covered with plaster until four years ago when it was cleaned off by the present tenant.



Entering from the rear court-yard is what was probably the kitchen in ancient times. The roof is of oak, and the principals, collar beams and purlins are all visible. The open fireplace is 10 ft. wide, and has ovens 2 ft. square built into the sidewalls. The chimney is supported by a massive oak beam 12 in. by 10 in. An old oak cider press stands in the centre of the apartment. The mortices are four inches square, and pass through a circular base 15 inches in diameter. It is weighted above by an oak beam 8 ft. long by 24 in. by 18 in., and the tray for the apples is 5 ft. square.

As is to be expected from a house of such antiquity Chambercombe Farm is said to be haunted. The haunted room adjoins that used by Lady Jane Grey. It is said that in 1865 the then tenant was making some repairs to the outside of the house when he discovered the outline of what had been a window for which he could not find a room appertaining. Investigation led to the discovery of a chamber between Lady Jane's room and one adjoining, in which on the remains of a handsome bedstead lay the skeleton of a woman. She was supposed to have been a Spanish woman, who having been wrecked near Hele, was captured by smugglers and conveyed through the secret passage which existed between the farm and Hele Beach. It is supposed she was robbed and left to die of starvation. The ghost of this poor lady is said still to haunt the room, and weird sounds are to be heard there at night.

This room has now no entrance to it except a hole in the wooden partition which shuts it off from the passage running between the rooms adjoining on each side. The subterranean passage spoken of above has



never been discovered in its entirety, though traces of what are evidently portions of it have been found quite recently.

In spite of its great age this picturesque old house stands sturdy and strong and showing no sign of decrepitude in its vital parts, and will certainly stand for many a generation yet to attest the honest work of its builders and afford intense interest to the large numbers who visit it each year drawn by the magic of its romantic story.







K.M. & Co.

CHAMBERCOMBE VALLEY.



## The Haunted Room.

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### THE LEGEND OF CHAMBERCOMBE MANOR.

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IT was a warm summer afternoon in the sixties of the last century. Peace brooded over the time stained buildings of Chambercombe farm. The only sound to be heard was the murmur of the brook close by and the rustle of the gentle breeze in the trees that grew thick on the hillside overlooking the courtyard. Even the fowls were quiet and the farm dogs lay basking in the sun. Most peaceful of all perhaps was the figure of the farmer who sat in a huge chair set by the porch. Dinner was over and he had come out to enjoy his pipe in his favourite shady corner by the door-way of the house. But the pipe now lay on the ground where it had fallen from his hand, and his face was turned to the sky with eyes closed, while an expression of beatific contentment overspread it—the good man was asleep.

Had it been any other day in the week you would not have found him in this condition, but it was market day and his wife was away at Barnstaple disposing of the butter and eggs and other produce of the farm, and the saying that “when the cat’s away the mice will

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play" held good in this case. Not that we would liken the good woman to one of the feline tribe, but there is no doubt that the "grey mare was the better horse," as far as the management of affairs was concerned, and the old man was taking advantage of her absence to indulge in a few minutes extra enjoyment of his ease.

But neglected duty has a very unpleasant way of revenging itself on one by refusing to permit that ease of conscience without which enjoyment cannot be, and it took its revenge on the farmer by troubling his dreams until he awoke with a start. He sat up and reached for his pipe. He filled it slowly and then began searching for a match. Finding one in the capacious pockets of his sleeved waistcoat, he was just on the point of striking it when he paused, and a frown drove away the contentment on his face.

"Dang un, if I bain't forgot un, after all" he exclaimed. He rose to his feet reluctantly and walked out into the sunshine. That morning before she departed his wife had reminded him that there was a leakage in the roof of the house above her store-room, and had laid strict commands on him that he should see to its repair before her return. Husband-like, he had forgotten all about it until that moment, but he knew from previous experience that it would not be well if he failed to do what the good lady had told him, so with a sigh for his lost ease, he set about considering how the job had best be tackled. Gazing contemplatively at the roof he could see where the leakage into the store-room took place. It was almost directly above the window of the room, but, unfortunately his wife had taken the key with her, and as entrance to it was thus prevented, the job

3.11



would have to be done from the outside. There was a passage next the store-room with a window opening on to a balcony from which easy access could be had to the low roof, and the farmer cast his eye towards this thinking that this would save him the trouble of fetching a ladder. It was then that the poor man got a shock such as he had never had in his life before, and certainly never wished to again. Was the house bewitched? Though a stolid unemotional man, he started back and rubbed his eyes in bewilderment, for there staring him in the face, was a window where no window should be. We have already stated that there was a passage next to the store-room. The window which lighted the store-room and the window of the passage were therefore side by side. At least, they ought to have been, but what had so startled the farmer was the discovery that they were not; there was a window, a window he had never noticed before, between them.

Utterly bewildered, the poor man kept rubbing his eyes, murmuring all the time—"Our Sal's bedroom, one—passage, two—wife's store-room, three—own bedroom, vore—that's vore, surely. But, dang it, there's five!"

Dazed as he was by the strange affair, it did not take him long to realise that if there was a window between the passage and the store-room there was probably a room of some kind there as well and if that was so it was strange that no one had noticed the fact before. Certainly, inside the house there was no indication of such a room existing, except—the worthy man rubbed his scanty locks in perplexity as another peculiar fact slowly dawned on him. The passage was quite a narrow one, and the store-room was merely an ordinary sized room,



but adding those two together—it now struck him forcibly that they occupied about half the width of the house, a fact that seemed unaccountable to him now when he thought of their relative dimensions.

Was there, then, an apartment between them whose existence they had never suspected until now? He would soon find out. The farmer was fully roused out of his laziness now. Shouting to some of the “hands” at work close by to bring picks and spades, he hurried upstairs and began testing the walls of the passage. But they seemed solid enough, and there was no sign of door or other opening in them. He came downstairs again and went through the great stone paved kitchen (once the dining hall of the manor house) to the other end where another stair led up to the storetoom. (It had never struck him as curious that the two halves of the upper storey were divided from each other by the passage wall, and entrance to these halves obtained by stairs at each end of the kitchen, when it would have been so much simpler to have a doorway into the storeroom from the passage, but the fact seemed significant now.) He had forgotten it was locked, but in his excitement he did not hesitate to put his shoulder to the door—which was a new one of flimsy construction—and burst it open. Here the wall seemed solid too, but in the light of his new knowledge he could not fail to see that if it really was a wall dividing the room from the passage, it must be of enormous thickness, which it manifestly could not be, for the walls downstairs were not. His excitement growing each minute, and now sure that he was on the eve of some discovery—treasure perhaps, for there were many tales of such connected with the old place—he



called his men, and himself seizing a pick, the room was soon filled with dust and the sound of blows as the men lustily attacked the wall. As an encouragement he roared: "Down wi' un boys. Virst o' ye thro' un shall ha' Dame's apern vull o' zilver gerts!" (groats.)

In the midst of the uproar the farmer's wife returned, and, not unnaturally, was considerably upset when she saw the treatment her storeroom was receiving. But her shrill questions got no better answer than that the "goodger" (devil) was in the house. Storm as she might, no one took any notice, for they were all too busy and excited. A few moments more and the wall was pierced by the farmer's pick. Being of cob it did not take long to enlarge the hole sufficiently to allow the farmer to thrust his head and shoulders through. It was too dark to see anything except that what was on the other side of the wall was *not* the passage, but apparently a small room. At this proof of his reasoning powers the good man was much elated, and curiosity overcoming her rage, his wife backing him up, he speedily had the hole enlarged until it was big enough to admit of his passing through. Shouting for a candle, which was speedily brought, he stepped through, closely followed by his wife. They found themselves in a long, narrow, but very low room. The remains of magnificent tapestry covered the walls. A wardrobe, table and chairs—all falling to pieces with age—of beautifully carved black oak, were ranged round the walls, while the centre of the room was occupied by a large four post bedstead of the same wood. The hangings were drawn close and were shrouded in the dusty cobwebs that covered everything. The dim light filtering through the dirt-begrimed



panes of the window that had so astonished the farmer, fell upon the ashes of a woodfire in the wide grate. The air was close and musty, and there was an eerie feeling in the room, as though the ghosts of its former inhabitants still haunted it. The farmer and his wife were both conscious of a strange depression of spirits as they stood gazing around them in silent wonder. But it was the bedstead with its close drawn curtains that impressed them most. The woman nudged her husband pointing :

"Draw un, Jan," she whispered, "draw un, if thee be-est a mon."

Jan was no coward but he felt a strange reluctance to do so. However, he had been used to obeying his wife too long to rebel now, and he went forward and taking hold of the dusty hangings, pulled them back. His wife was looking over his shoulder, and she shrieked loudly as her eyes fell on what the curtains had concealed, while even Jan gave a grasp of horror. On the pillow, yellow with age, was a grinning skull, while a bony arm lay white against the crimson coverlet, the skeleton fingers clutching at the linen.

The sight was too much for the farmer's wife who fell down in a swoon. Even the farmer himself was so much affected that he was glad to seize his good wife in his arms and hurry from the room, telling his men to build up the wall again as quickly as they could. But their troubles were not at an end yet. Both were much upset by their experience, and the wife not feeling very well during the night, the farmer got up to open the window of the room. It was moonlight, and the courtyard was bathed in the mystery of night's luminary.

3.15



Above, all was quiet and beautiful, but on the ground—it was now the farmer's turn to let out a howl of terror and flee back to bed where he buried his head under the clothes and shook in fear. The courtyard was filled with impish figures dancing a wild and unholy dance. Their grotesque and horrible shapes were contorted in the most extraordinary forms as they bounded and kicked, while their evil faces moped and mowed at the farmer as they shook menacing fists in his direction. But what made the scene more fearful was the fact that not a sound came from the horrid crew. Their feet made no noise on the stones of the yard; they spoke no word and uttered no shout. It was many a day before the good farmer and his wife recovered from their fright, and still longer before the haunted room was opened again, and the mystery of the skeleton cleared up.

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NOTE—It may be as well to explain, for the better understanding of the legend, that the five windows counted by the farmer consisted of the three which are now visible in the upper story of the inhabited portion of the house; one which can be seen in the wing which stands at right angles to it, and is now used as an outhouse; and one which is now built up, the outlines of which can still be traced midway between the chimney stalk and the aforesaid wing. It was this latter window that lighted the haunted room, and caused the puzzlement of the worthy farmer.

The passage that now connects Lady Jane Grey's room with the bedroom beyond did not, of course, exist in those days; there was, therefore, no obstruction between the window and the room as now shown. The room had a double floor (the upper one is now removed but its position can easily be seen) and, doubtless, the space between was used as a hiding place for the spoils of the smugglers,





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